

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 41 (2014)  
**Heft:** 6  
  
**Rubrik:** news.admin.ch

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# The Swiss Abroad Act has been adopted

*The most important law for the Swiss community abroad will soon become a reality unless a referendum is called contrary to expectations.*

On 26 September 2014, the Federal Assembly adopted the “Federal Act on Swiss Persons and Institutions Abroad”, in short the Swiss Abroad Act. The National Council approved the law by 160 votes to 18 with 18 abstentions. The Council of States passed it with no opposing votes and one abstention. It was published in the Federal Gazette (source texts in German, French and Italian see bottom of this article) on 7 October 2014, which means the three-month referendum deadline expires on 15 January 2015.

The law does not introduce any fundamentally new rights or obligations but brings together the most significant aspects for the over 730,000 Swiss Abroad in a single act so they are no longer distributed between various laws, ordinances and regulations. It covers the political rights of the Swiss Abroad, social welfare, consular protection and other consular services. The possibility of electronic voting in referenda and elections is also expressly incorporated into the act. The Federal Council can, in addition, take measures to encourage the exercising of political rights by our compatriots abroad.

The Swiss Abroad Act also forms the basis for federal government to support institutions which promote relations between the Swiss Abroad themselves and with Switzerland or provide them with assistance. The law specifically mentions the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA).

The Act explicitly states that Swiss citizens who reside or travel abroad bear personal responsibility for doing so. Personal responsibility involves, in particular, avoiding risks by considering alternative courses of action or overcoming difficulties by one's own means in the event of danger. Personal responsibility also includes observing the laws of the country of residence or country visited. What is more, Switzerland should only act in a subsidiary capacity, particularly with regard to social welfare and consular protection. The law also defines a single point of contact which constitutes a significant part of the efforts towards a comprehensive policy on the Swiss Abroad referred to as “coherent” in the parliamentary proposal. With the central single point of contact for all matters concerning the Swiss Abroad, the FDFA will ensure the requirements-led provision of services as a public service.

Provided a referendum is not called, the law can enter into force on 1 November 2015 at the earliest. The drafting work on the ordinance on the Swiss Abroad Act will continue until then. The most significant changes for the Swiss Abroad will be explained in detail in “Swiss Review” over the course of 2015.

The Swiss Abroad Act goes back to the postulate submitted by Filippo Lombardi, Council of States member from Ticino, entitled “The Swiss Abroad – a link to the world”. In its requested report on policy on the Swiss Abroad, the Federal Council acknowledges the importance of the Swiss Abroad and comes to the conclusion that setting out a comprehensive policy on the Swiss Abroad would be beneficial. Following this report, on 15 June 2011 Filippo Lombardi submitted the parliamentary initiative “for a Swiss Abroad Act”, which was accepted by the Federal Assembly at the beginning of 2012. In close cooperation with the FDFA, the Council of States’ competent Political Institutions Committee drew up the bill and presented it to Parliament on 17 January 2014.

DIVISION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE SWISS ABROAD

*The text of the Swiss Abroad Act can be found at:*

*German: [www.admin.ch/opc/de/federal-gazette/2014/7229.pdf](http://www.admin.ch/opc/de/federal-gazette/2014/7229.pdf)*

*French: [www.admin.ch/opc/fr/federal-gazette/2014/6965.pdf](http://www.admin.ch/opc/fr/federal-gazette/2014/6965.pdf)*

*Italian: [www.admin.ch/opc/it/federal-gazette/2014/6213.pdf](http://www.admin.ch/opc/it/federal-gazette/2014/6213.pdf)*



The Aletsch Arena in Bettmeralp, Valais

## At the turn of the year

The Consular Directorate wishes all “Swiss Review” readers a wonderful and peaceful festive period and every success and happiness in 2015. We look forward to continuing our successful relationship.

**IMPRINT:**  
“Swiss Review”, the magazine for the Swiss Abroad, is in its 41st year of publication and is published in German, French, Italian, English and Spanish in 14 regional editions. It has a total circulation of 400,000, including 140,000 electronic copies. Regional news appears four times a year. The ordering parties

are fully responsible for the content of advertisements and promotional inserts. This content does not necessarily represent the opinion of either the editorial office or the publisher.  
**EDITORS:** Barbara Engel (BE), Editor-in-Chief; Stéphane Herzog (SH); Marc Lettau (MUL); Jürg Müller (JM); Peter Zimmerli (PZ), responsible for

“info.admin.ch”, Relations with the Swiss Abroad, FDFA, 3003 Berne, Switzerland  
**TRANSLATION:** CLS Communication AG  
**LAYOUT:** Herzog Design, Zürich  
**PRINT:** Vogt-Schild Druck AG, 4552 Derendingen.  
**POSTAL ADDRESS:** Publisher, editorial office, advertising: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26,

3006 Berne, Tel.: +41313566110, Fax: +41313566101, Postal account (Swiss National Giro): 30-6768-9. Email: [revue@aso.ch](mailto:revue@aso.ch)

**COPY DEADLINE** for this edition:  
28.10.2014

All Swiss Abroad who are registered with a Swiss representation receive the magazine free of charge. Anyone else can subscribe to the magazine for an annual fee (Switzerland: CHF 30 / abroad: CHF 50). Subscribers are sent the magazine direct from Berne. [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch)

**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** Please advise your local embassy or consulate. Do not write to the editorial office in Berne.



# New FDFA website

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) launched a new modern and well-structured website in mid-October 2014. At [www.eda.admin.ch](http://www.eda.admin.ch) you will find comprehensive coverage of political issues, information on the consular services of the Swiss representations abroad and on living abroad, country dossiers, FDFA travel information and much more.

The content of the FDFA webpages is now thematically focused on its target groups (Swiss Abroad, Swiss travelling abroad, foreign tourists in Switzerland, media, etc.). Visitors to the website can access the desired content directly via the section headings.

In addition to the FDFA homepage, there are linked websites for specific topics, such as European politics or development co-operation. The modern design is functional and well organised, and a clear visual style presents the FDFA's commitments in a contemporary way with specifically selected topics.

## A webpage for every country

The information on Switzerland's relations with other countries, emigration and living abroad has been restructured. The activities, responsibilities and services of the Swiss embassies, consulates general, regional consular centres and the development cooperation and humanitarian aid offices have been brought together on one webpage per country.

## The following topics appear on every country webpage:

- > News
- > Representations
- > Travel advice
- > Living in ...
- > Services
- > Visa and entry into Switzerland
- > Switzerland and ...

Users therefore obtain direct access to the topics and services of interest to them when visiting the country pages..

“News” contains information from the Swiss representation in the destination country and an agenda with details of events. The Swiss presence and its responsibilities are briefly described under “Representations”. The “Living in ...” section is aimed at Swiss citizens residing in the country concerned as well as those who are planning to emigrate.

The wide range of consular “services” is set out in its own comprehensive section. General information is now available in four or five languages (German, French, Italian, English and sometimes Spanish). The “Visa and entry into Switzerland” section takes visitors to the relevant information of the responsible federal authority. “Switzerland and ...” provides an insight into the various aspects of bilateral relations between the two countries.

The screenshot shows the FDFA website for France. The top navigation bar includes links to 'L'Administration fédérale', 'DFAE', 'La Suisse dans le monde', 'Helpline', 'Contact', and language selection. The main content area features a large image of a snowy mountain peak with a person in the foreground. Below the image are several sections: 'Actualité' (News), 'Representations', 'Conseils aux voyageurs', 'Vivre en France', 'Services', 'Visa & Entrée en Suisse', and 'La Suisse et la France'. To the right, there is a sidebar for 'Actualités' (News), an 'Agenda' section with an event from 02.10.2014, and a 'Services' section.

The information previously published in various places is now being provided in a user-friendly way on “country-specific websites” for 134 countries. Pictured is the country website for France: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/france/fr/home.html>

The details of the FDFA's helpline, which is available to Swiss citizens around the clock, are also easy to find. They are listed in the footer on every page and in the right-hand column on selected pages.

Website visitors can also explore the content using a high-performance search function. Every single webpage is searched in all languages for content-relevant keywords, and search results are displayed based on relevance. The search function is therefore a key tool for accessing the content sought even faster.

TEAM PROJECT-WEBEDA, GENERAL SECRETARIAT FDFA

The screenshot shows the FDFA homepage. The top navigation bar includes links to 'Bundesverwaltung', 'EDA', 'Die Schweiz weltweit', 'Helpline', 'Jobs', 'Medien', 'Kontakt', and language selection. The main content area features a large image of two smiling women. Below the image is a section titled 'Die Fünfte Schweiz' with the text: 'Die sogenannte Fünfte Schweiz ist über sämtliche Kontinente verstreut und umfasst alle Altersgruppen. Mit über 170'000 immatrikulierten Schweizerinnen und Schweizern ist Frankreich das beliebteste Aufenthaltsland.' There is also a 'Kontakt' section for 'Auswanderung Schweiz EDA'.

The FDFA homepage:

<https://www.eda.admin.ch> – Swiss abroad – “Living abroad”

# Publications

## Politorbis

Politorbis is a review of Switzerland's foreign policy published by the FDFA in German and French. The 58th edition entitled "Bei Not und Krise im Ausland" (Distress and Crisis Abroad) was produced by the Relations with the Swiss Abroad division at the FDFA's Consular Directorate. It outlines the development of Switzerland's consular protection and crisis management from the Luxor attack in 1997 to the present day. From issues faced by travellers to moving accounts of experiences from people involved in crisis management, this edition is a fascinating read with its wide-ranging topics.

Download the 58th edition here at [www.eda.admin.ch/publikationen](http://www.eda.admin.ch/publikationen)

Printed versions can be ordered from: [politorbis@eda.admin.ch](mailto:politorbis@eda.admin.ch) indicating the reference: "Ref. 58, 3/2014"

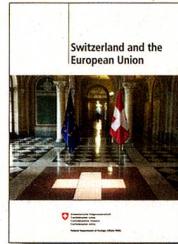
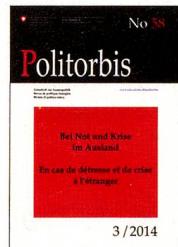
## Switzerland and the EU

The new "Switzerland and the European Union" brochure is now available. It provides an overview of how the EU works as well as its origins and development. It also contains information on Switzerland's relations with the EU, the bilateral agreements and the challenges facing Swiss policy on Europe over the coming years.

The brochure can be ordered free of charge in German, French, Italian and English (art. no. 201.335.D, 201.335.F, 201.335.I, 201.335.E) from FOBL, Federal Publication Sales, 3003 Berne, Switzerland.

[www.bundespublikationen.admin.ch](http://www.bundespublikationen.admin.ch).

It is also available in electronic format on the website of the Directorate for European Affairs (DEA) [www.eda.admin.ch/europa/publikationen](http://www.eda.admin.ch/europa/publikationen) or can be ordered there.



## Important notice

Please notify your Swiss representation of your email address(es) and mobile telephone number(s) and/or any changes to these and register at [www.swissabroad.ch](http://www.swissabroad.ch) to ensure you do not miss any communications ("Swiss Review", newsletters from your representation, etc.).

The latest issue of "Swiss Review" and previous issues can be read and/or printed out at any time at [www.revue.ch](http://www.revue.ch). "Swiss Review" (or "Gazzetta Svizzera" in Italy) is sent free of charge to all households of Swiss abroad who are registered with an embassy or consulate general either in printed format or electronically (via email or as an iPad/Android app).

# Federal referenda

Two proposals will be put to the vote on 8 March 2015:

- Popular initiative of 5 November 2012 "Familien stärken! Steuer-freie Kinder- und Ausbildungszulagen" (Strengthen families! Tax-free child and educational allowances)
- Popular initiative of 17 December 2012 "Energie- statt Mehrwertsteuer" (Energy tax instead of VAT)

All information on the proposals (voting pamphlet, committees, party statements, electronic voting, etc.) can be found at [www.ch.ch/abstimmungen](http://www.ch.ch/abstimmungen).

Other referendum dates in 2015: 14 June, 18 October (federal elections), 29 November.

You will find details, instructions, useful information and further links relating to the federal elections on 18 October 2015 at [www.ch.ch/Wahlen2015](http://www.ch.ch/Wahlen2015). This is a joint website run by the Federal

Chancellery, Parliamentary Services, the Federal Statistical Office and ch.ch.

## Popular initiatives

The following federal popular initiatives had been launched at the time of going to press (deadline for the collection of signatures in brackets):

- "Für die Würde der landwirtschaftlichen Nutztiere (Hornkuh-Initiative)" (For the dignity of livestock (horned cow initiative)) (23.03.2016)
- "Für Ernährungssouveränität. Die Landwirtschaft betrifft uns alle" (For food sovereignty. Agriculture concerns us all) (30.03.2016)

The list of pending popular initiatives can be found at [www.bk.admin.ch/Aktuell/Wahlen und Abstimmungen/Hängige Volksinitiativen](http://www.bk.admin.ch/Aktuell/Wahlen und Abstimmungen/Hängige Volksinitiativen).

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